

Women's health



a workplace issue

UNISON is the UK's leading public service trade union for women and we are determined to ensure that working women have all the information they need to be healthy and safe at work.

Women are roughly half of the UK workforce and 65% of public sector employees so women's health should be an important issue for employers as well as employees.

UNISON believes that employers should be taking women's concerns and issues into account when they are introducing or using sickness absence and health and safety policies. If this doesn't happen then women are not being treated fairly and equally.

**UNISON**
the public service union



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UNISON reps support members through capability procedures or when they ask for reasonable adjustments to enable them to work. But many managers can be ignorant of or unsympathetic about conditions such as endometriosis or the menopause which make it difficult for women to get the support they need. At the same time workplace sickness absence policies often use inflexible trigger levels setting off formal procedures that could ultimately lead to an unfair dismissal.

UNISON will speak up on behalf of our women members experiencing such problems in the workplace. For the employer there is a clear financial benefit in adopting policies and practices that consider the needs of their women employees. UNISON reps should consider the negotiation of the following:

- Sickness absence procedures flexible enough to cater for women's health issues and, in exceptional circumstances, modifying the trigger levels to take account of women's health issues. Women should not be penalised if they need time off for gender-specific health conditions.
- Training for line managers so that they are aware of gender-specific health conditions and what adjustments may be necessary to support women at work.
- Appropriate adjustments such as flexible working hours in order to deal with symptoms, or giving women some control over their working environment such as the temperature in their workplace and toilet breaks.
- Freely available guidance on gender-specific illnesses and conditions, so that everyone knows that the employer has a positive attitude to the issues.
- Opportunities for women employees to speak confidentially about their condition to someone from human resources or from an employee assistance programme, particularly if their line manager is male. This may make it easier for them to raise their concerns.

- Training for those who undertake workplace risk assessments to ensure they are aware and take account of women's health issues.
- Involvement of both women and men in decision-making bodies and in monitoring and reviewing processes.

Further information

If you are a UNISON member experiencing problems at work because of your health, contact UNISONdirect on 0800 0 857 857.

There for You offers a unique confidential advice and support service just for members of UNISON and their dependants.

www.unison.org.uk/thereforyou

Resources for women members

www.unison.org.uk/women

NHS Choices information on women's health

www.nhs.uk/chq/Pages/category.aspx?CategoryID=60

Women's Health Concern, a charity providing unbiased, accurate information

www.womens-health-concern.org

Terrence Higgins Trust information for Trans women

www.tht.org.uk/sexual-health/Sex,-reproduction-and-gender/Trans-women

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